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*Robert Burns,
the poet of the people*

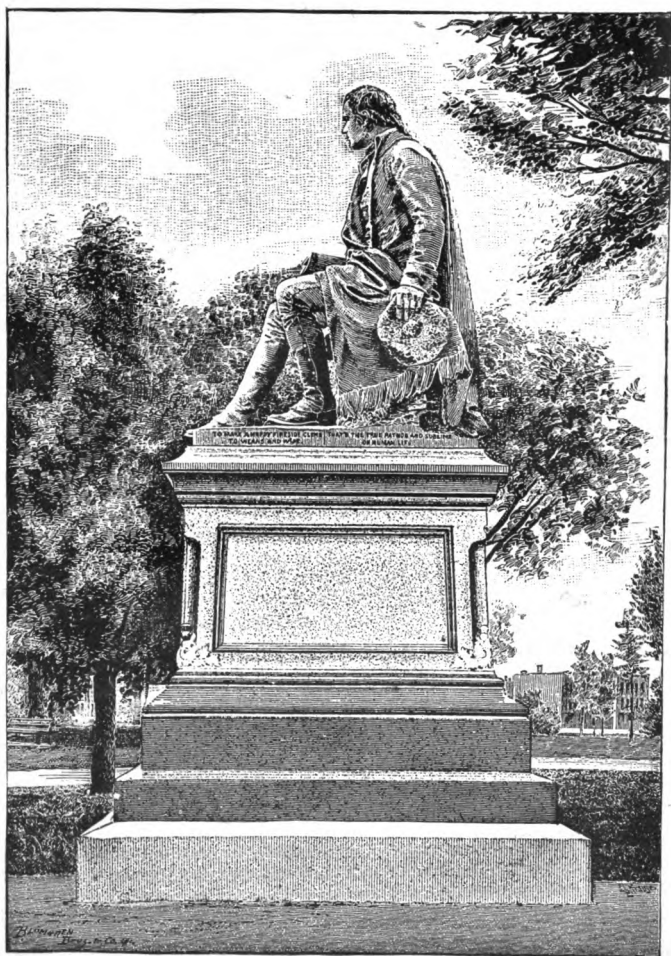
George Claude Lorimer



1950-1951



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MONUMENT TO BURNES AT ALBANY, N. Y.

ROBERT BURNS

The Poet of the People

CHICAGO

Here he is
Left to us
Blunt
Barley, &c.
1899



CHICAGO:
BELFORD-CLARKE CO.

1899



PLANS AT ALBANY, N. Y.

ROBERT BURNS

The Poet of the People

BY 
GEORGE C. LORIMER, LL.D.

Here he lies all calm and lanely;
Loftier brows maun lie as meanly;
Blume, ye wild field flowers o'er him!
Birdies, wi' your sangs, deplore him."

HUGH MILLER.



CHICAGO:
BELFORD-CLARKE CO.

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AT THE GRAVE OF BURNS.

SEVEN YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH.

Fresh as the flower, whose modest worth
He sang, his genius "glinted" forth,
Rose like a star that, touching earth,
For so it seems,
Doth glorify its humble birth
With matchless beams.

The piercing eye, the thoughtful brow,
The struggling heart, where be they now?
Full soon the Aspirant of the plough,
The prompt, the brave,
Slept, with the obscurest, in the low
And silent grave.

I mourned with thousands, but as one
More deeply grieved, for He was gone
Whose light I hailed when first it shone,
And showed my youth
How Verse may build a princely throne
On humble truth. — *William Wordsworth.*

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

Robert Burns, the Poet of the People, was born in a cottage on the banks of the Doon, about two miles from Ayr, on the 25th of January, 1759. His father was servant to a gentleman who lived near Ayr. In his twenty-third year Robert Burns joined a Flax-dresser named Irwin with a view of learning the trade. A disastrous fire put an end to this scheme, and left the poet penniless and without a trade. Later on he joined his brother and became a farmer. On the failure of the farming, Burns began to publish his poems. He soon attracted the attention of prominent men of letters, and notably the patronage of the Earl of Glencairn. In February, 1788, he took the farm at Ellisland on the banks of the Nith. Shortly after this he married his "darling Jean." In 1789 he was appointed an officer of Excise. In 1791 he removed to Dumfries. Here he made many enemies by his strongly expressed sentiments concerning the French Revolution. His oft-repeated opinions nearly lost him his position. He was retained in office after a very severe reprimand. This stern reproof embittered his proud spirit. Sickness overtook him. He went for a

BIOGRAPHICAL.

season to Brow in Annandale, on the shore of the Solway-Frith, hoping that sea-bathing might help him. But the hope was destined to disappointment. He returned to Dumfries, where he died on the 22d of July, 1796



ROBERT BURNS.

ROBERT BURNS.

THE LUTE AND THE BIRD: A PROFILE.

AN old fable extant which relates a contest between a lute and a nightingale of evening—the bird that sings when feathered minstrels are dumb—was the harmonies of mortal science, and the sweetness of its strains. Chords were answered by warbling cadences; but, the lutester surpassed the lute in strength, and broken—lead on to trembling strings of its dying rival. And yet, in dying it was glorious; for the spirit of music which in that glorious toot passed into the air of sound, ever afterwards breathing in the woods, and blending in them woodland songs. This charming fable has its counterpart in biography. A hundred years in the shadows and darkness of poverty in circumstances which silence earthly voices they to strident curses, a melodious soul came forth into singing. To him humanity was



ROBERT BURNS.

THE POET OF THE PEOPLE.

There is an old fable extant which describes a musical contest between a lute and a nightingale. The bird of evening—the bird that sings when other feathered minstrels are dumb—was thrilled by the harmonies of mortal science, and sought to excel them with the sweetness of its own ravishing strains. Chords were answered by trills, and melody by warbling cadences; but, alas! while the songster surpassed the lute in sweetness it failed in strength, and broken-hearted fell dead on the trembling strings of its more enduring rival. And yet, in dying it was still victorious; for the spirit of music which throbbed in that glorious throat passed into the instrument of sound, ever afterwards breathing in its notes, and blending in them woodland witchery. This charming fable has its counterpart and interpretation in biography. A hundred years ago, in the shadows and darkness of poverty, in circumstances which silence earthly voices or keys them to strident curses, a melodious soul broke forth into singing. To him humanity was

a divinely fashioned lute, whose fair ideals and exultant hopes were ever shaping themselves in tender verse and triumphant epic. He sought no rivalry, only companionship. The songs of others encouraged and inspired his own; only they soon surpassed all others, as the free notes of the lark excel the piping of the tame canary. 'Ah, me! in a little while the bard was hushed by envious death. Broken-pinioned, and broken-hearted, too, he laid him down to die. But even in dying he was not defeated. The spirit of melody that was in him passed into humanity, and since his day has beautified poetry with nature's radiant charms, has tuned it into harmony with all that is dear to the people's heart; and more than this, it has evoked the hallowed poetry of generous deeds, of guileless charity and of kindly brotherhood.

I need hardly say that this extraordinary genius of humble birth was "the heaven-taught ploughman"; the "peasant bard" of whom McNeil has written:

" His was the gift wi' magic power,
To catch the thought in happy hour,
To busk his verse wi' ilka flower,
O fancy sweet——"

and to whom Wordsworth pays this worthy tribute:

" Deep in the general heart of men
His power survives."

Some years ago I visited the Cannongate Cemetery, in Edinburgh. An aged sexton directed my way among the habitations of the dead. Knowing that in a sense earthly distinctions end not with the grave, I inquired who, among this dense and speechless population, yet received the special homage of the living. The old man reverently led me to a granite mausoleum, severe in its aspect and gloomily pretentious. "Here," said he, "sleeps the dust of a philosopher, the famous Dugald Stewart." He then walked slowly toward a corner of the burial place where a huge stone built in the wall recorded the name of "Adam Smith," author of the "Wealth of Nations." Not a word fell from his lips as, with stony glance, he stood before the memorial slab, rigid and grim as one of the weather-worn monuments. Breaking the silence, I remarked, "This one was a sociologist." "Aye," he answered, "something of that kind, though hereabouts they ca' him an economist," laying a drawling stress on the initial "e." "My friend," I asked, "do many persons visit this particular grave?" "Na; no mony," he replied. "Only twa classes are interested in him, they wha have heaped up the sillar and they wha desire to get rich; the first I jalouse come to worship their god, and the ithers to get inspiration from him." The words were uttered slowly, and in somewhat of a dry, sarcastic tone. Immediately he

pursued a path among the grassy hillocks until he reached a simple headstone, about five feet in height, and turning to me, he spoke with a touch of pathos in his voice: "Here rests a' that is mortal of a poet. Mair people seek out this spot than ony ither i' the kirkyard. He sang their waes, their joys and hopes, and a' the poor folk love his memory." I read the inscription:

"HERE LIES ROBERT FERGUSON, POET.

"BORN SEPTEMBER 5TH, 1751; DIED OCTOBER 16TH, 1774."

"No sculptured marble here, nor pompous lay,
No storied urn, nor animated bust;
This simple stone directs pale Scotia's way
To pour her sorrows o'er her poet's dust."—

and as I read I needed not the sexton's garrulous description of how this grave had gone unmarked until a peasant poet, grieved at the neglect, out of his own scant earnings had reared this modest tribute to his brother poet. The generous builder of this monument was none other than Robert Burns. There on its face was the significant fact recorded, and on its back the initials "R. B." rudely chiseled by that hand which had penned immortal verse destined to thrill mankind. I could not but be deeply moved by this solicitude for the fame of one who had been as unfortunate as he was gifted. Burns always and gladly acknowledged that he owed much to the stimulating power of Ferguson's works. His

appreciation of the genius that inspired them, and his own gratitude, he expressed by rescuing the neglected grave from oblivion. As I turned aside from the old cemetery I thought, How natural it is that he who was so mindful of another's memory should himself be cherished in the heart of the living; and that he who guarded a brother's name should have his own recorded in brass and marble. And if he who confers benefits deserves a monument, and if the worth of the monument should be commensurate with the value of the benefit, Burns is surely entitled to one of the grandest ever reared by thankful love. This impression has extensively prevailed, and hence, not only in Scotland, but in other lands, stone and bronze have been shaped and molded to celebrate the music and magic of his muse. Even Westminster Abbey has not refused him a niche by the side of Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare and Thomson; and Dean Stanley has celebrated his "tender pathos," his "wise humor," his "sagacious penetration," and has not hesitated to class him "with the universal teachers of all churches." The latest of these tributes, and in some respects one of the most significant, was unveiled August, 1888, in the beautiful Washington Park of Albany. There in the center of a fair garden, like a revived Eden, in the very heart of a poem writ in flowers, trees, rocks and lakes by the poetic soul of the venerable city, with

thousands of spectators rejoicing and cheering, was uncovered to the gleaming skies he loved so well a magnificent and artistic figure of Scotland's sweetest poet. And well it is, and according to eternal fitness, that a woman's affection and generosity should have crowned his undying fame with this new honor; for woman inspired his first song and his last, and this kind woman's gift may embolden some timid bard, as yet unknown, to charm the ages with his lyre.

“All nature swears the lovely dears
Her noblest work she classes, O;
Her 'prentice han' she tried on man,
And then she made the lasses, O.”

Of the particulars of the bequest made by Miss McPherson, which has added a notable treasure to the art possessions of New York's capital, I need not write. The newspapers of Albany have familiarized the public with all the facts in the case, as they have with the rare ability and indefatigable zeal of Peter Kinnear, Esq., to whom was intrusted the execution of the lady's wishes. These have been amply chronicled, as has the manly eloquence and fervid praise of the chief orator of the occasion, Rev. Robert Collyer. It is not necessary to repeat what has been so well described by others; but the brilliant scene in the Park, with the events which led to it, impel me, in this vast Auditorium, to put in such poor speech as I can command, an estimate of the hero in whose

honor all was done, and some reflections regarding the place he occupies in the affections of multitudes of intelligent Americans.

That Scotchmen and their descendants should be jubilant over the erection of a monument to their favorite bard is easily understood, for they are a clannish race, and everything that relates to their native land kindles anew the patriotic fire. The story has been often told of the regal reception a daisy met with in Australia. Some emigrants succeeded in transporting it across the seas to Melbourne, and when it was known that this little Scotch flower had arrived in full bloom, some 15,000 men and women who had come from the same soil hastened to greet it, wept over it, and carried it in procession to a home in the new world. It was part of the old country come to them, a small part, truly, but a part that revived the memory of lowly cottages, of courtship hours, of fragrant fields, and of graves that should be seen no more. Ah! if a daisy, "wee, modest, tippét flower," could move these crowds so deeply, it is not surprising that the name of him who glorified in his song the "bonny gem," should thrill and sway his countrymen in Australia and America. But, believe me, in this instance they feel that they are influenced by other and higher motives than mere national pride. They claim that Robert Burns belongs not to Scotland only, but to the world;

that he wrote not for a race, but for mankind; and that in no land, not even in that of his birth, is he entitled to deeper love and higher honor than in this, their adopted home — America.

America is sufficiently enlightened to fear no truth, strong enough to dread no foe, rich enough in skill and wealth to shrink from no competition, and altogether too great for her to deal other than magnanimously with rivals. In her calm and generous hours she will not deny that what she is must in some degree be attributed to the energy of multitudes who were foreign-born. Indeed, all her citizens are of alien stock, except the "poor Indian," the difference being only one of degree, some having come over in the "Mayflower" and others in the latest fleet-winged monarchs of the deep. But of those who have reached these shores during the last fifty years, thousands have proven their devotion to the republic, have bravely fought in her armies, have loyally upheld her institutions, and industriously have developed her resources. Unquestionably, the hospitality of this country has been abused. Many have sought its shelter, influenced by greedy speculators, to diminish by pauper competition the price of American labor, others to escape the obligations of toil, dreaming of reward without work, of maternity without marriage, and of a universe without God. Few, if any, Scotchmen

have been found in these dangerous classes, and fewer still who believe that they should longer be permitted to invade the territory of these States. They, in common with hosts of other nationalities who cherish freedom and the principles of constitutional government, protest against the unrestrained incoming of foreigners to denounce what they do not understand, and to destroy what they have not capacity to improve. To such citizens as these—men who would loyally defend liberty from the assaults of licentiousness—a hearty welcome is extended by the people of this land. Their naturalization is eagerly sought, and positions of public trust and distinction are readily placed within the reach of their ability and ambition. But this assimilation of the best manhood of other countries is matched by another, and one more germane to the purpose of this address—namely, the adoption of the great authors that make literature in other portions of the globe as associates and colleagues of the famous men who represent literature here. It is one of the glories of the American nation that having been in many things taught by European celebrities, having been enriched by their scholarship, inspired by their poetry, and refined by their art, it does not hesitate to avow its indebtedness and to evince its gratitude generously and nobly. Columbia has no Valhalla, no Westminster,

where the images of departed heroes can greet the eye of the living ; she only has her parks ; but there the forms and faces of Humboldt, Schiller, Goethe, Shakespeare are permanent witnesses of her reverence for genius wherever born, and of her deep conviction that the entire race has a heritage in its achievements and triumphs. Rome adopted the gods of conquered territories in every clime, Columbia adopts the thinkers. The new republic in this choice shows more wisdom than the old republic displayed ; for deities, such as they are, are numerous, but thinkers are scarce. To bring together the "outward presentment" in bronze and stone of the world's mental giants, to unite those whom geography divided, is a most laudable undertaking ; for it recognizes, and tends more fully to realize, the brotherhood of all classes and races. England has done something in this direction by placing the bust of Longfellow in her Westminster. But America takes the lead in this cosmopolitan endeavor. She with conspicuous impartiality naturalizes the dead heroes of every land, enrolls them with her own mightiest citizens, wreathes them with fresh laurels, and reconciles living aliens, separated by ethnic and creed prejudices, and blends them in one homogeneous fraternity by this homage to the memory of their departed worthies. To the names of these famous men who speak to the present from the

past, she has added that of Robert Burns ; and right is it that he should be thus honored, for not only was his genius universal, but in its chief characteristics was, perhaps, more essentially American than that of any other poet not native-born.

He loved liberty with passionate fervor. His devotion to this sacred cause echoes in the stirring verse:

“ Wha will be a traitor knave ?
Wha can fill a coward's grave ?
Wha sae base as be a slave ?
Traitor ! coward ! turn and flee ! ”

He justified the revolt of the British Colonies, and his heart responded sympathetically to the efforts of all peoples to shake off the yoke of tyranny. In 1788 he wrote: “ I dare say the American congress of 1776 will be allowed to be as enlightened as the English convention was in 1688; and that their posterity will celebrate the century of their deliverance from us as duly and sincerely as we do ours from the oppressive measures of the wrong-headed house of Stuart.” It is also reported of Burns, that he declined in a mixed company to drink to the health of William Pitt, and proposed as a substitute, “ The health of a greater and better man, George Washington.” It is, however, thought by some of his critical biographers that he carried his interest in the cause of freedom too far,

and that it blinded him to the enormities perpetrated by the French in the overthrow of the Bourbons. In support of this allegation his ill-advised present of three coronades he had captured from a smuggler, which, however, never reached the convention at Paris, is urged and appropriately colored. While this fact may afford some slight ground for the charges brought against him, it is not sufficient to convict him. He shared with others the hopes that were born of the gigantic upheaval in France, and may have said and done some imprudent things; but there is no good reason for the supposition that he failed to regard with horror the criminal bloodshed which stained and disgraced the movement. His idea of liberty was not that of the anarchist, nor that of the idle agitator and demagogue. The sentiments he entertained are happily expressed in the lines:

“The wretch that wad a tyrant own,
And the wretch, his true born brother,
Who would set the mob above the throne,
May they be d——d together.”

* * * * *

“Here's freedom to him that wad read,
Here's freedom to him that wad write;
There's nane ever feared that the truth should be heard,
But them whom the truth would indict.”

These are certainly American sentiments: that mob law should not be tolerated, that justly con-

stituted authority should be respected, that oppression should be resisted, and that truth, guided by enlightenment, should be allowed, unhampered, to pursue her glorious mission. Over and over again, in various ways and in various connections, these ennobling thoughts sound forth in the songs and poems of Burns. And on this account, and because of his sympathy with our revolutionary sires, I regard him as essentially American in his spirit, and as pre-eminently worthy an exalted place in the nation's temple of fame.

But this is to take a too narrow and circumscribed view of his merits, and to base our admiration on what is altogether too local and selfish. To praise Burns because he cherished our principles is somewhat partisan in temper, and sounds a little like a commercial transaction. His image should stand on a loftier and broader pedestal. Let us, therefore, proceed to construct it; or, in other words, patriotic considerations apart, let us attempt to build anew the real foundation on which rests his higher right to our love and homage.

He was a poet, and true poets are for all times and all climes. With Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Racine, Dante, Bryant, Halleck, Lowell, he marches in stately procession, filling the world with melodious thoughts; and if not first in this "goodly fellowship," assuredly he is not last.

There have been men — and their race is not yet extinct — hard, practical, grinding men, to whom the universe was only a machine, and the only profits of existence those that can be tabulated in ledgers, and to whom the writers of verse were as flowers and birds, ornamental, but exceedingly useless. Utility is still the idol of not a few, utility, coarse, material, mercenary. They count it a great thing that they are unmoved by sentiment, that they are superior to emotion, and can laugh and sneer at enthusiasm and rhapsody. It were doubtless a hopeless task to argue with these persons, but their existence justifies the effort to vindicate the poet's function from their aspersions.

Like music, poetry is difficult to define. It is something more than the "language of feeling"; for much of such language has been heard in which was nothing but commonplace ejaculation and exclamation: it is something more than "the indirect expression of that which can not be directly expressed," else our new Tallyrand politicians, who frequently "employ speech to conceal thought," would be among our grandest bards; neither is it merely lawless fancy, nor "a wild eye in frenzy rolling," nor even a sweet tongue in frenzy multiplying metaphors and tropes. I do not deny the presence of these qualities in greater or less measure in all true poetry, but I contend that they may be com-

bined in a high degree, and yet the very soul and essence of poetry be absent. What is this soul, this essence? Perhaps I can hardly hope to succeed in describing what so many wiser men have failed to portray. Nevertheless, I may be allowed in all modesty to state how the subject shapes itself to my thinking.

To me, poetry is the musical or rhythmical expression of the ideal that lies enfolded and concealed in the real. The plant contains the flower; that is, the ideal slumbers in the heart of the real, and the sun rises and calls it forth to fragrant beauty. A diamond is imprisoned light, consists of the outward surface, the real and the hidden glory, the ideal; and the lapidary releases the splendor, that is, gives liberty to the ideal. There is to all existence, animate and inanimate, to man and nature, an exoteric and an esoteric side, the outward and the inward, the soul and the body, the real and the ideal. The poet deals with the esoteric, and as high priest of these mysteries it is his function to render it exoteric in such shape of beauty as shall fitly represent its essential character. Wordsworth and others have familiarized us with the thought that the physical is only a counterpart of the spiritual, and that material forms are but types of the unseen. A poem lifts the curtain, whether the veil be the flower's shape or man's personality, or the star's

luster, and draws into fellowship and human converse everlasting spiritual verities. It is transcendentalism in verse; it is philosophy in beauty and in clearness; a Mount of Transfiguration where the divine penetrates, shines through and glorifies the commonplace. Poetry is not logic. It is higher than logic, it is insight—insight into the heart of things—and borders on omniscience. Poetry is not reason; it is intuition, the intuition of love. The language it speaks is universal. We readily understand Hafiz, though we may be ignorant of Persian, as thousands have comprehended Goethe, Schiller and Corneille, who have never acquired German or French. A great poem addresses every man, apparently, as on the day of Pentecost, in the tongue wherewith he was born.

Hence, just in proportion as it is obscure and unintelligible does it decline in poetic worth. What is gained in subtlety is lost in genuine poetry. It is no virtue in Robert Browning that his verse at times demands an expositor, and that even then its meaning remains undecided. Gifted as he is, marvelous in resources, grand, and often clear as grand, in the majestic sweep and rush of his mighty thought, he frequently loses himself and his readers in labyrinthian metaphysics; and when this is the case he abandons Parnassus for the Pœcile Porch.

Judged aright, poetry is one of the most practical of blessings. Science makes discoveries, and we praise it, but its discoveries lie in the domain of the physical; poetry brings to light equally great discoveries in the domain of the spiritual. Commerce unites nations by the ties of selfishness, poetry binds them closer by the bonds of affection. Statesmen make laws, build constitutions and governments; poetry animates them with national spirit; hence a wise man has said, "Let me write the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws." And on a battle-field a hymn or verse has done as much to secure victory as the most elaborate instructions or the most splendid equipments.

It is evident if this definition is even approximately correct, that the real poet must be a highly endowed and exquisitely fashioned soul. It is usually claimed that he is gifted with genius; but when it is asked, "What is genius?" reflective minds think, and rarely try to answer. Sismonides, however, has this comparison, helpful as far as it goes, but which leaves the real question still in uncertainty: "Genius, compared with talent, is like the oak compared with low plants at its feet. The oak, indeed, shoots from the same earth, and is subject to the same laws of vegetation; but it aspires to a higher region of air, and when we view it in single majesty, we forget that the humble shrubs be-

neath its shade are in the same class of organization." According to this passage, the poet differs from ordinary men in degree only; and yet, as there is some undiscovered inherent determining quality by which one seed develops into an oak, and seeks fellowship with the sky, while the other lingers in communion with its native earth, so there must be something, call it what you please, that differentiates the bard from the rest of the race. We term this indescribable something "genius," and then we are compelled to retire the whole subject, with the secrets of growth and life, to the unexplorable domain of mystery. Its possessor is like his fellow beings in many things, in feelings, emotions, passions, and probably is more intensely human than them all, lives in a sublimer altitude, and, resembling trees that find rootage on the edge of the glacier, he feeds on heaven's light. His nature is usually as susceptible to impressions as the surface of a lake, which is shadowed by every passing cloud, and which reflects in its depths the distant stars; or, to change the figure, is as sensitive as Memnon's statue to the rays of the rising sun, or as a fine-strung harp to the soft touch of summer's zephyrs. Happily does Tennyson sing:

"The poet in a golden clime was born,
With golden stars above,

Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
The love of love,
He saw through life and death, through good and ill,
He saw through his own soul —
The marvel of the everlasting will. An open scroll,
Thus truth on truth was multiplied. The world
Like one vast garden show'd,
And through the wreaths of floating dark upcurled
Rare sunrise flowed.
And freedom reared in that august sunrise,
Her beautiful bold brow.
When rites and forms before his burning eyes
Melted like snow."

In Robert Burns we find a living impersonation of this vivid picture from the pen of England's Laureate. The sacred fire, the insight, the impressibility, the imaginative force, the creative spirit necessary to sweetest song, dwelt in him immeasurably. Varying slightly the phraseology of Novalis, it may be said of him: "He transformed external things into thoughts, and thoughts into external things; he was the true enchanter, who by identifying himself with an object, compelled it to become what he would." Were he alive and were he vain enough to write concerning his own genius, he might with eminent propriety adopt some lines of Browning as sufficiently descriptive of its comprehensiveness, versatility and independence:

"I have not chanted verse like Homer's, no —
Nor swept string like Terpander, no — nor carved
And painted men like Phidias and his friend;

I am not great as they are, point by point;
But I have entered into sympathy
With those four, running these into one soul,
Who, separate, ignored each other's arts.
Say, is it nothing that I know them all?
The wild flower was the larger—I have dashed
Rose-blood upon its petals, pricked its cup's
Honey with wine, and driven its seed to fruit,
And show a better flower, if not so large.
I stand, myself."

Thus the genius of Burns entered into sympathy with whatever was divine and ennobling in history and song, was not exclusive, but poured these gathered treasures into his melodious soul, and forth they came again in new life with fresh forms and unmatched beauty. His flowers may not have been as large as those which sprang from more famous soil; but he dashed his with blood and wine, and so they showed better, if not so large. Referring to our poet, Goethe confirms this conception. He says: "How is he great, except through the circumstance that the whole songs of his predecessors lived in the mouth of the people—that they were, so to speak, sung at his cradle; that as a boy, he grew up amongst them, and the high excellence of these models so pervaded him that he had therein a living basis on which he could proceed further?" And yet, while Burns needs his surroundings to account in some degree for the character of his genius, they can not explain its fruitful originality. That stands by itself un-

challenged and acknowledged, and any adequate description of it, requiring, as it would, the reproduction of his works, would be itself a poem, and one as grand as the wonder it essayed to portray. Phidias confessed that his magnificent statue of the Olympian Jupiter was inspired by Homer's verse recounting the glories of that dread deity; but though it was thus derived from the Bard of Chios, its elaboration and execution by the sculptor were his own. There was no servile copying. What he wrought was in accord with an image created by his own thought, which was to the ancient world a revelation of god-like majesty. Burns likewise, from whatever sources material came, whether from nature, from ballads, or tradition, shaped them after an ideal of his own, and breathed into them a life springing directly from his own soul. Only by taking into consideration this originality can we understand the lowly man—

“Whose lines are mottoes of the heart,
Whose truths electrify the sage.”

It is worthy of note in this connection, that the “Bard of Ayrshire,” as he has been called, has been likened to Shakespeare. He has been named by his admirers “The Scottish Shakespeare”; but the resemblance is not marked, save, perhaps, in that clear insight into human nature which distinguished them both. If he knows not as much of man in some conditions

as the greater poet, he manifests a sincerer interest in his welfare, particularly in that of the burdened poor, than he. "His heart is in his poems," and these throb with sympathy for the distressed, the homeless and the "disendowed classes," as Victor Hugo terms them. He is the poet of the people, divinely moved to sing their sorrows and plead their cause. Though as profoundly influenced by creation's varied loveliness as Thomson or Wordsworth, and though at times as devoutly affected by unseen mysteries as Cowper, he ever seems to be in closer fellowship with suffering souls and with everything that concerns the happiness of mankind than with suns and stars and glassy brooks and religious creeds.

Of this we have proof in two very different poems. In the one describing his call to his vocation by the Scottish Muse, he displays his passionate enthusiasm for nature, and in the other, "The Daisy," his tender sympathy with humanity.

TO A MOUNTAIN DAISY,

ON TURNING ONE DOWN WITH THE PLOW IN APRIL, 1786.

Wee, modest, crimson-tippèd flower,
Thou's met me in an evil hour;
For I maun crush amang the stoure
Thy slender stem;
To spare thee now is past my power,
Thou bonny gem.

Alas ! it's no' thy neibor sweet,
The bonny lark, companion meet,
Bending thee 'mang the dewy weat,
 Wi' speckled breast,
When upward springing, blithe, to greet
 The purpling east.

Cauld blew the bitter, biting north
Upon thy early, humble birth;
Yet cheerfully thou glinted forth
 Amid the storm,
Scarce rear'd above the parent earth
 Thy tender form.

The flaunting flowers our gardens yield,
High sheltering woods and wa's maun shield;
But thou, beneath the random bield
 O' clod or stane,
Adorns the histie stibble-field,
 Unseen, alane.

There, in thy scanty mantle clad,
Thy snawie bosom sun-ward spread,
Thou lifts thy unassuming head
 In humble guise;
But now the *share* uptears thy bed,
And low thou lies !

Such is the fate of artless maid,
Sweet floweret of the rural shade !
By love's simplicity betray'd,
 And guileless trust,
Till she, like thee, all soil'd, is laid
 Low i' the dust.

Such is the fate of simple bard,
On life's rough ocean luckless starr'd !

Unskillful he to note the card
 Of prudent lore,
 Till billows rage, and gales blow hard,
 And overwhelm him o'er !

Such fate to suffering worth is given,
 Who long with wants and woes has striven,
 By human pride or cunning driven
 To misery's brink,
 Till wrench'd of every stay but heaven,
 He ruined sink !

Even thou who mourn'st the Daisy's fate,
 That fate is thine—no distant date ;
 Stern Ruin's plowshare drives, elate,
 Full on thy bloom,
 Till crush'd beneath the furrow's weight,
 Shall be thy doom !

Compare with this his lines to

THE SCOTTISH MUSE.

"I saw thee seek the sounding shore,
 Delighted with the dashing roar ;
 Or when the North his fleecy store
 Drove through the sky,—
 I saw grim nature's visage hoar
 Struck thy young eye.
 Or when the deep-green mantled earth
 Warm cherished ev'ry flow'ret's birth,
 And joy and music pouring forth,
 In every grove,—
 I saw thee eye the general mirth
 With boundless love."

In an epistle to William Simpson he writes:

“We’ll gar’ our streams and burnies shine
Up wi’ the best !
We’ll sing auld Colla’s plains and fells,
Her moors, red-brown wi’ heather bells,
Her banks and braes, her dens and dells.”

And faithfully he kept his promise. He immortalized the scenery of his native land, and made the whole world sharers in its sublimities and beauties:

“No more his simple flowers belong
To Scottish maid and lover:
Sown in the common soil of song,
They bloom the wide world over.
In smiles and tears, in sun and showers
To minstrel and the heather,
The deathless singer, and the flowers
He sang of, live together.”

But he did more than this. He discerned the poetry hidden in the common things of daily life. The ideals concealed in the real—in the realities, stern and forbidding, of ill-requited toil, of penury and pain, of disappointment, exile and death—he disclosed as never had been done before. He made plain the patience, courage, self-sacrifice and heroic devotion to which these evils are capable of giving rise, and enshrined them in his song. Many of his poems are battle cries to fortitude and endeavor. They are vigorous with the iron of

self-reliance and independence, and they breathe the strong assurance of the coming better time, for which he would have the true-hearted everywhere pray:

- “Is there, for honest poverty,
That hangs his head, and a' that?
The coward slave, we pass him by,
We dare be poor, for a' that!
For a' that, and a' that!
Our toils obscure, and a' that;
The rank is but the guinea-stamp,
The man's the gowd, for a' that.
- “What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hodden gray, and a' that;
Give fools their silks, and knaves their wine,
A man's a man, for a' that!
For a' that, and a' that!
Their tinsel show, and a' that;
The honest man, though e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men, for a' that!
- “Ye see yon birkie, ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, and stares, and a' that;
Though hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a coof, for a' that;
For a' that, and a' that!
His riband, star, and a' that;
The man of independent mind,
He looks and laughs at a' that!
- “A king can mak a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a' that;
But an honest man's aboon his might,
Guid faith, he maunna fa' that!
For a' that, and a' that!
Their dignities, and a' that,
The pith o' sense and pride o' worth
Are higher ranks than a' that.

"Then let us pray that come it may—
 As come it will, for a that—
 That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth
 May bear the gree, and a' that.
 For a' that, and a' that!
 It's comin' yet, for a' that,
 That man to man, the warld o'er,
 Shall brothers be, for a' that."

Thus nobly he trusts and hopes. Other poets
 have sought subjects fitting their muse in for-
 eign countries, in the courts of monarchs, in the
 circles of nobility, or in the tents of soldiers and
 the battlefield; he found them near at hand in
 his own land, in poor "Mallie's death," in
 "Twa Brigs," in "Twa Dogs," in family worship,
 and in "Tam O'Shanter's ride."

"Ae market night
 Tam had got planted unco right,
 Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
 Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely;
 And at his elbow Souter Johnny,
 His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony;
 Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither—
 They had been fou for weeks thegither!
 The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter,
 And aye the ale was growing better;
 The Souter tauld his queerest stories,
 The landlord's laugh was ready chorus,
 The storm without might rair and rustle—
 Tam didna mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
 E'en drowned himsel amang the nappy.
 As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
 The minutes winged their way wi' pleasure.
 Kings may be blessed, but Tam was glorious,
 O'er all the ills o' life victorious!"

Wonderful the power of a man who can find a theme for verse in the drinking habits of his times! While there is a charm about "Tam," there is a vein of satire and condemnation further on in the poem, when the inebriation brings in its train the witches — fantastic conceptions of a delirious brain — for witches haunted the brains muddled with the whisky of a century ago, as snakes are born of that used in the present time. The bard was not blind to the penalty incurred by strong and deep potations. In several other productions he either satirizes or condemns their demoralizing attractions in this, our monotonous life.

The value of his teachings is incomputable. They exalt familiar scenes and occupations, open the way for ordinary humanity to see that there is something elevating in the obscure, and they promote contentment, for they make plain that however poor the outward circumstances may be, they need not be degrading. We are ever in danger of materializing our lot, and he who enables us to escape this error is deserving of our gratitude. This does Robert Burns, and does so charmingly and effectively. The poet of the people, himself one of the people, lifts the thoughts and aspirations of the people above things sordid, mean and base, and allies the honest man with princes, yea, exalts him over kings as the noblest work of God; and surely,

then, it is natural that in this land of the people such an one should be counted worthy of love and veneration.

Thomas Carlyle has created the impression that the personality of our bard was grander than his poems; and that, while he may claim our admiration because of what he wrote, he is especially entitled to it because of what he was. It is stated on reliable authority that Lord Jeffrey, of "Review" celebrity, seeing him on the streets of Edinburgh, was so struck by his appearance, and not knowing who he was, continued to follow him with his eyes. A friend seeing his interest, said to him, "Aye, ye may well look at yon man—that's Robert Burns." Every one who met him in those days bears testimony to his physical vigor and attractiveness. He was five feet ten in height, well proportioned and strong, and was distinguished for the size and luster of his eyes. Sir Walter Scott could never banish from his memory their "glowering" brightness. But while his body was compactly built and massive, not a few writers regard his character as far otherwise. Thorne, in his "Modern Idols," speaks of him in terms of disparagement which I do not care to repeat; and a New York author some years ago charged his eulogists with the sin of "canonizing the vicious." Can such a grave accusation with fairness be laid at their door? His best

friends and warmest admirers will admit with William Howitt, that he was no "faultless monster"; but is it credible that one who could elicit the eloquent encomiums of rigid Carlyle, to say nothing of the panegyrics which have been pronounced in his honor by hosts of Christian ministers, could have been a disreputable and depraved wretch? Such a supposition is simply unbelievable. But it is important, especially important to Americans, if his image is to be placed in their parks, and if even by implication he is to be set forth as entitled to veneration, that the truth involved in the contradictory estimates of his character should be ascertained. No people can afford to extol genius at the expense of manly virtue; for that were to encourage the pernicious delusion that splendid ability extenuates notorious vice. Were such to be the outcome of the enthusiasm for the "Ploughman Poet," his monuments had better be pulled down, and his memory consigned to deserved oblivion. I am persuaded, however, that neither is this criminal compromise with corruption nor this indignant iconoclasm demanded. Burns was far from being perfect, but there were in him such heroic qualities, generous impulses, Titanic energy and such intensity of sincerity that his very faults and failings are softened and subdued in the dazzling light of his many excellencies. He rises before us like a sun-tipped, sky-aspiring

granite peak, whose grandeur renders us almost oblivious to the fact that birds of prey have made their abode there, and that some boggy ground lies dark and yielding at its base. And as such a peak awakens the sense of the sublime and elevates the thoughts and longings of the soul, so the lofty, massive majesty of his character is such, that in spite of its acknowledged defects, the totality of its influence is wholesome and stimulating.

Robert Burns was a studious and thoughtful man. He was not frivolous, shallow, giddy, disdaining mental discipline. His father was an intelligent peasant, who was sufficiently versed in the Bible to draw up his own confession of faith, and who did his utmost for the education of his children. Encouraged by the head of the house, the son improved the poor opportunities for instruction afforded by the village school, and, in addition, made himself at an early age familiar with Shakespeare with Locke's essay on "The Human Understanding," with Allan Ramsay, and with Taylor on "Original Sin"; that is, with literature, metaphysics and theology. He acquainted himself in some degree with French, and his English style bears witness to the close perusal of various classics. Born in poverty, reared in comparative indigence, he conquered the disadvantages of his lot, and was, in the true sense of the phrase,

self-made. "Making" implies effort, application and endurance, and the making of self demands more of these virtues than the construction of anything else. Lockhart quotes the poet as confessing that "he lacked aim," which is not, however, to be construed as indicating an absence of purpose in the direction of self-culture. He was an ardent student and a diligent seeker after knowledge almost to the close of his career. What he accomplished in his chosen field was not due exclusively to genius, unless it was "the genius for hard work." He plodded, delved, pondered, contemplated, mused, and was ever intent, rapt and engrossed in his pursuits; for he was no prodigy to read and write without learning, or to express high thoughts without thinking. It is a sign of the strain and burden of his intellectual life that he was frequently the victim of melancholy. Gifted with acute sensibility, as he advanced in intelligence and his reasoning powers developed, he became more fully conscious of his own misfortunes and those of the ploughmen and herdsmen he associated with. Had he known less, he would have discerned less, and, doubtless, would have felt less. How like the plaintive wail of a wounded soul are the famous lines, "Man was Made to Mourn." But these could hardly have been penned by an illiterate hand,

for they reveal, not merely the sympathy of a sensitive nature, but the pathos of a refined and enlightened mind :

* * * * *

“ Look not alone on youthful prime,
Or manhood's active might;
Man then in useful to his kind,
Supported is his right.
But see him on the edge of life,
With cares and sorrows worn,
Then age and want—oh! ill-match'd pair!—
Show man was made to mourn.

“ A few seem favorites of fate,
In pleasure's lap carest;
Yet think not all the rich and great
Are likewise truly blest.
But, oh! what crowds in every land
Are wretched and forlorn!
Through weary life this lesson learn—
That man was made to mourn.

“ Many and sharp the numerous ills
Inwoven with our frame!
More pointed still we make ourselves—
Regret, remorse and shame!
And man, whose heaven-erected face
The smiles of love adorn,
Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn!

“ See yonder poor, o'erlabor'd wight,
So abject, mean and vile,
Who begs a brother of the earth
To give him leave to toil;
And see his lordly fellow-worm
The poor petition spurn,
Unmindful though a weeping wife
And helpless offspring mourn.

“ If I’m design’d yon lordling’s slave —
By nature’s law design’d —
Why was an independent wish
E’er planted in my mind?
If not, why am I subject to
His cruelty or scorn?
Or why has man the will and power
To make his fellow mourn?

“ Yet let not this too much, my son,
Disturb thy youthful breast;
This partial view of human kind
Is surely not the last.
The poor, oppress’d, honest man,
Had never, sure, been born,
Had there not been some recompense
To comfort those that mourn.

“ O, Death! the poor man’s dearest friend —
The kindest and the best!
Welcome the hour my aged limbs
Are laid with thee at rest!
The great, the wealthy, fear thy blow,
From pomp and pleasure torn;
But, oh! a blest relief to those
That, weary-laden, mourn!”

Toward the close of his life the seasons of melancholy increased. They were doubtless deepened by misfortune, by disappointment, and by a sense that he had not been duly appreciated. Not unlikely he grew morbid as disease made inroads on his constitution, and he saw the end approaching prematurely. But be that as it may, the thoughtful, studious vocation is always a lonely one, and its heritage has in it much of sadness. This was the experience of

the Scottish minstrel, as it was that of Goldsmith, Richter, Schiller, and as it will be of all who desire emancipation from the gross, sordid and material. The name of Burns, and his likeness in bronze or marble, remind us that there is no achievement without loss, and that he who would save his life in the high and intellectual sense, must be content to lose it in the low and physical sense of the phrase. And more than this, his example teaches that man is not necessarily and entirely the creature of circumstances. He can prove himself superior to them, can subdue them, and even render them tributary to his greatness. Poverty is not destiny, an humble station is not fatality. They can be overcome, they can be mastered. The career of Homer, Terence, Virgil, Horace, Shakespeare, Bloomfield, Lincoln, Garfield, with multitudes of others who "were born and bred in huts where poor men lie," proclaims the same inspiring truth. It is of advantage to a nation that it be frequently repeated, and especially in this land, where, as a rule, the people must prove the architects of their own fortune, if fortune they are to have at all.

Robert Burns was likewise a brave and independent man. His fierce and prolonged struggle with adversity, and his loyal attachment to persecuted friends, fully attest his courage. Like John Knox, "he feared not the face of clay." True,

he seems to have lost heart when he purposed self-exile to Jamaica, but this momentary weakness was not unnatural. Even a Jonah, an Elijah and a Jeremiah succumbed, and complained in somewhat of a craven manner. But whether excusable or not, this timid irresolution led to the publication by subscription of his first volume at Kilmarnock—a single copy of which a few years ago brought at auction \$300—for the purpose of procuring funds for the voyage; and what is more to the point, the printing of his poems rendered him famous and kept him at home. He had now to contend with as great a peril as poverty—with popularity. Throughout Scotland he was lauded and flattered by the lowly classes, and if praise could have stored the pantry it would never have been empty. As a result of his fame he was introduced into literary and aristocratic circles in Edinburgh, and his independence was put to a severe test. In the charming society of the capital he met the beautiful and brilliant Duchess of Gordon, Dugald Stewart, Hugh Blair and other distinguished personages, but he did not lose his modesty or his manhood. All who saw him then concur in testifying to the simplicity of his manners. He was unaffected, and no one could detect in him any disposition to fawn on his patrons or surrender his principles. On one occasion, walking down the High street with a

noble friend, he returned the timid salutation of an old acquaintance dressed in the garb of a farmer. Seeing the surprise depicted in the face of his companion, he answered, "Hoot! I bowed to the man, not to his clothes, and I tell you he is a grander man than either of us." The same spirit animated him in very different and more humiliating circumstances. During his second visit to the capital he was invited to dinner at the house of a nobleman. Judge of his indignation when he was set down at the butler's table in the servant's hall, and was not received with the grand company. After the meal he was sent for, and a chair being placed for him he was requested to sing a song. Repressing his anger, he consented, and broke forth.

"Ye see yon birkie, ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, and stares, and a' that ;
Though hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a coof for a' that.
(*Here he pointed to his languid host*)
For a' that, and a' that,
His ribband, star, and a' that,
The man of independent mind,
He looks and laughs at a' that."

This incident, very strikingly described by Howitt, with the burden of the song, admirably illustrates the temper of its chief actor. But while he was so thoroughly and heartily independent, he never failed to render a tribute of

gratitude to those who had befriended him. While he was intolerant of the supercilious patronage of the petty gentry — who received from his presence more honor than they could confer—he was manfully mindful of what he owed to generous and noble souls, who succored him without ostentation in his hour of need. Witness, in contrast to his apparently rude conduct in the supper chamber of his paltry patron, his pathetic and graceful tribute to the memory of the Earl of Glencairn.

“ In Poverty’s low barren vale
Thick mists, obscure, involved me round ;
Though oft I turn’d the wistful eye
Nae ray of fame was to be found.
Thou found’st me, like the morning sun,
That melts the fogs in limpid air—
The friendless bard and rustic song
Became alike thy fostering care.

“ Oh ! why has worth so short a date,
While villains ripen gray with time ?
Must thou, the noble, generous, great,
Fall in bold manhood’s hardy prime !
Why did I live to see that day ?
A day to me so full of woe—
Oh ! had I met the mortal shaft
Which laid my benefactor low !

“ The bridegroom may forget the bride
Was made his wedded wife yestreen ;
The monarch may forget the crown
That on his head an hour has been !
The mother may forget the child
That smiles sae sweetly on her knee ;
But I’ll remember thee, Glencairn,
And a’ that thou hast done for me.”

His sentiments regarding the supreme dignity of personal independence appear in many other of his compositions, as in the lines that refer expressly to his father :

“My father was a farmer upon the Carrick Border,
And carfully he bred me up in decency and order ;
He bade me act a manly part, though I had ne’er a
farthing,
For without an honest, manly heart no man was worth
regarding.”

This seems to have been the guiding star of our poet throughout his dark and stormful passage to the grave. He seeks to keep clear of pecuniary indebtedness, for he instinctively feels that the borrower is servant to the lender. The thought of owing anything chafes his proud spirit, depresses him, and fills him with the gloomiest forebodings. It may be that in this he was an extremist, as he was in some other things; but surely in an age like ours, when sycophancy is so common, when parasites multiply with the increase of wealth, and when the experiment is being frequently made of trimming sails to contrary winds, it is wholesome and stimulating to think of one who was not a time server, and who held his head up almost to insolence, and it can not be otherwise than invigorating to come across his image in our pleasure drives, the silent and impressive witness of the world’s homage.

Robert Burns was a devout and truthful man

Veracity and veneration are very closely allied. When falsehood is cherished all that is divine in the soul withers and dies. As Carlisle has shown over and over again in "Hero Worship," its presence is incompatible with greatness, and leads to shame and everlasting contempt. Whatever may be fairly said to the disparagement of Burns, it can not be proven that he evaded the duty of sincere speech. Indeed, he was so far from sinning in that direction, his honest utterance exposed him to the charge of irreligion. He has been accused of sympathy with the French infidels of his day, and he has been denounced as godless and atheistic. These damaging representations are not sustained by his biographers, by Lockhart, Currie, William Howitt or by Jolly, and they are indignantly denied by a pious Scotchwoman who printed a little book vindicating his moral influence. (*Elliot Stock, Paternoster Row, London, 1886.*) According to her testimony, he was not an unbeliever, though he would scarcely have passed for orthodox with the "unco guid." Extreme Calvinism he rejected, and he was fearless enough to say so, and to expose the inconsistencies of some who regarded it as the infallible exposition of God's dealings with His creatures. On any other supposition it is incredible that among his early friends he should have numbered several clergymen, or that they should

have taken the pains they did to introduce him where his abilities would be recognized. Yet they not only did this, but some among them corresponded with him, and one of their order, Dr. Blair, not only sent him excellent advice, but even amended one of his poems and that, too, the most offensive to his critics. I refer to the "Holy Fair," and the verse altered by the rhetorician is the one —

"Now a' the congregation o'er
Is silent expectation,
For Moodie speels the holy door
Wi' tidings o' salvation.

"Should Hornie, as in ancient days,
'Mang sons o' God present him,
The very sight o' Moodie's face
To's ain het hame had sent him
Wi' fright that day."

The change suggested was the substitution of the word "damnation" for "salvation," which doubtless improved the wit of the line, but certainly detracted from its reverence. I have referred to a Scotchwoman's vindication of the poet's memory from the charge we are considering. In the course of her defense she relates that on being entertained one night in the hospitable manse of the Rev. George Laurie, he was so deeply moved by the amiability and piety of the family that he wrote a prayer which was found in his chamber next morning:

" O Thou dread Power, who reign'st above,
 I know Thou wilt me hear,
 When for this scene of peace and love
 I make my prayer sincere.

" The hoary sire, the mortal stroke
 Long, long be pleased to spare,
 To bless his filial little flock,
 And show what good men are.

" She who her lovely offspring eyes,
 With tender hopes and fears,
 Oh, bless her with a mother's joys,
 But spare a mother's tears.

" When soon or late they reach that coast
 O'er life's rough ocean driven,
 May they rejoice, no wanderer lost ;
 A family in heaven ! "

Surely he who wrote these lines was no God-defying monster, and he who penned "The Cotter's Saturday Night," and traced Scotland's glory to family worship and an open Bible, is not to be ranked with malignant unbelievers.

" The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
 They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;
 The sire turns o'er wi' patriarchal grace
 The big ha' Bible, ance his father's pride;
 His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
 His lyart haffets wearing thin and bare;
 Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
 He wales a portion with judicious care;
 And 'Let us worship God,' he says, with solemn air.

* * * * *

"Then kneeling down to Heaven's Eternal King,
 The saint, the father, and the husband prays:
 Hope 'springs exulting on triumphant wing,'
 That thus they all shall meet in future days:
 There ever bask in uncreated rays,
 No more to sigh or shed the bitter tear,
 Together hymning their Creator's praise,
 In such society, yet still more dear;
 While circling time moves round in an eternal sphere.

* * * * *

"From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
 That makes her loved at home, revered abroad;
 Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
 'An honest man's the noblest work of God.' "

* * * * *

Neither can he be fairly classed with blatant scoffers who, in this manner admonishes a young friend:

"Yet ne'er with wits profane to range,
 Be complaisance extended;
 An Atheist's laugh's a poor exchange
 For deity offended!
 When ranting round in pleasures' ring
 Religion may be blinded;
 Or if she gie a random sting,
 It may be little minded,
 But when in life we're tempest driven,
 A conscience but a canker—
 A correspondence fixed in Heaven
 Is sure a noble anchor."

The fact is Burns exposed himself to censure in his parish, at the time when doctrinal controversy ran high, by espousing the side of the

Moderates. He could not understand how Infinite justice, to say nothing of measureless love, could foreordain some souls to eternal death:

“O Thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,
Wha, as it pleases best Thysel,
Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell,
A' for Thy glory,
And no for any guid or ill
They've done afore Thee!”

And so, being truthful, he just spoke what was on his mind. Is he to be blamed? Rather, ought he not to be praised? If we condemn him, then must we also be prepared to condemn multitudes of others who have cast off the yoke of the rigid and stern Augustan theology. Is there no Christianity outside of Calvinism? A milder and more humane doctrine prevails in the churches to-day, and many teachers and preachers entertain what Farrar calls “the larger hope.” They are evidently in their views nearer to the poet’s ideal than they are to that of his assailants. What, then; are they to be classed with the enemies of Christ? Must Channing, Beecher, Farrar, Robertson, Smythe be cut off from the body of the faithful? God forbid! Their names may be associated with errors—and whose creed is free from misconceptions?—but it would be the deadliest kind of bigotry to declare them religious outcasts and reprobates. The same judgment of

charity must exonerate him whose character we are studying, from the charge of infidelity. Though he speaks of himself as an "unregenerated heathen," and though it can not be shown that he was a model of piety, nevertheless he was no foe to the Bible, and even M. Taine admits that he is not to be ranked with the scoffers of the French Revolution. At heart he was devout, in mind he was perplexed ; and the worst that can be truly said of him is, that his honesty led him to conclude that he who rejects what he can not believe is more of a Christian than he who professes more than he really holds : and in these times of pretense and fictitious faith, when not a few avow incredible creeds, and are at no pains to ascertain their soundness, and who seem to feel no adequate sense of responsibility for the doctrines they support, it is well and of value to society that one should be frequently mentioned with honor, who, whatever may have been his deficiencies, discerned the intellectual immorality of subscribing to any form of thought, however orthodox it may be esteemed, when its truth is dubious and is quietly left undetermined.

In these respects our humble Scotch Apollo, whose keen arrows pierced to the quick the Python heart of bigotry, might have inspired Ten-nyson's famous lines:

" Perplex'd in faith, but poor in deeds,
At last he beat his music out;

There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

“ He fought his doubts and gathered strength;
He would not make his judgment blind;
He faced the spectres of the mind,
And laid them: thus he came at length

“ To find a stronger faith his own;
And Power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone,

“ But in the darkness and the cloud.”

The English poet has not been excommunicated from the church for these sentiments; why then should the Scotch poet be judged worthy of ecclesiastical censure and reprobation?

In addition to these characteristics, Robert Burns was possessed of graces that endeared him to his friends. He was a loving and genial man. He was ever an affectionate son and brother. After his death, his widow, Jean Armour, his brother Gilbert, and the herdsman who had served him at Mossgiel, Willie Patrick, bore cheerful testimony to the depth and sincerity of his attachments. That 12,000 mourning people attended his funeral indicates the esteem in which he was held by his neighbors, and the closeness of the ties binding him to his fellow-beings. The warmth and tenderness of his heart may easily be traced in the poems addressed to the two women who exerted a marked

influence on his career. They are exquisitely sweet, and in them appears some of his happiest allusions to nature; and his ardent passion for the works of God, as therein revealed, is quite as impressive in its way as his avowals of human love. For instance, read :

“ Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise;
My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.

How pleasant thy banks and green valleys below,
When wild in the woodlands the primroses blow—
Then oft, as mild evening sweeps over the lea,
The sweet-scented birk shades my Mary and me.”

Again, after the death of the Highland maid:

“ Thou lingering star, with lessening ray
That lovest to greet the early morn,
Again thou usherest in the day
My Mary from my soul was torn.
O, Mary! dear departed shade,
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
See'st thou thy lover lowly laid,
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?”

Similar susceptibility to nature's influences and to woman's fascinations is exhibited in the verses dedicated to the girl he finally married:

“ Of a' the airts the wind can blaw, I dearly like the
west,
For there the bonnie lassie lives, the lassie I lo'e best;
There wildwoods grow, and rivers row, and many a hill
between,
But day and night my fancy's flight is ever wi' my Jean.

“O blaw, ye westlin winds, blaw soft among the leafy
trees,
Wi’ gentle gale, frae muir and dale, bring hame the
laden bees.
And bring the lassie back to me, that’s aye sae neat and
clean,
Ae blink o’ her wad banish care, sae lovely is my
Jean.”

Much has been written, more has been surmised, and a great deal has been grossly exaggerated, regarding his relations with the fair sex. That he was immaculate, no one claims; that he was as censurable as some persons imagine has not been proven. He never seemed to conceal anything on this subject; and though he transgressed before marriage, his wife acquits him of infidelity after, however indiscreet he may have been. (*See Lockart's Biography*). His love for Highland Mary was of the purest description, and was interrupted only by her untimely death. To the mother of his children, in the face of insults from her father, and in perplexities which need not be recounted, he acted in a noble, manly way. His was an impulsive, enthusiastic, passionate nature, easily aroused. He likens himself to tinder, ready to take fire at the sight of beauty; but he was no betrayer of innocence, no destroyer of his neighbor's peace. This much may be said on his behalf. And while we condemn his shortcomings, we may

without suspicion of condoning what was wrong, repeat the words of a poet:

“And if at times an evil strain
To lawless love appealing
Break in upon the sweet refrain
Of pure and healthful feeling,
Still think while falls the shade between
The erring one and heaven,
That he who erred like Magdalene,
Like her may be forgiven.”

Alas! the weaknesses of the bard are not all summed up in the indictment we have just considered. His social disposition, his friendliness and humor, led him frequently into hilarious company, where strong drink sometimes overcame him. Forever is it to be deplored that he permitted “the thick smoke of intoxication to blend with the fire lent him by heaven”; ever is it to be regretted that he should have so far forgotten his dignity as to share in the gross mirth of the common village ale house; and unceasingly lamentable is it that the author of “Thou, Unseen, Almighty Power” should have done himself injustice by writing:

“Ye who oft finish care in Lethe’s cup,—
Who love to swear and roar and keep it up,—
List to a brother’s voice, whose sole delight
Is sleep all day, and riot all the night.”

What a contrast! What a comment on the perversion of genius! Yet, while he went far enough

in this reprehensible habit to grieve his friends and admirers, he was not as dissipated as some of his censors allege. He has been described as a very sot. His brother Gilbert resents the accusation; and Willie Patrick testifies that he was no inebriate at Mossgiel. Never was he a common drunkard, not even at Dumfries, when in the closing years of his life his excesses were more frequent. Some of his best work was done during these dark days, and constant, deep and bewildering potations would have rendered literary successes next to impossible. There is no need to exaggerate his failings, and justice should be done to his memory. In his day every one used liquor, and cases of intoxication excited no surprise. Even professed religious people did not regard alcoholic "elevation" as inconsistent with their vows. With but few exceptions, all drank, and it would therefore be difficult for Burns, especially with his temperament, to see anything wrong in what his neighbors' practiced; and he would be very liable, when indulging with the rest, to run to extremes. Nevertheless, he was not as notorious for excesses as were some of his more Puritanical associates, nor as guilty as "Holy Willie," whom he was severely censured for satirizing. A man's conduct should be judged in some measure by his circumstances, and by the spirit and the custom of the age in which he lived; and thus

judged, while the poet is not to be exonerated from blame, he should at least be treated with leniency and charity. The poet himself was not oblivious to the criminality of his weakness, and at times manifested the most sincere and poignant contrition for his fault—contrition, not for touching the exciting cup, as total abstinence was not then a virtue, but for draining it to its maddening dregs. It is to his credit that he deplored what he never knew how to master, and that he deeply realized his unhappy failings. Evidence is furnished of this, and of the internal struggle waged between conscience and appetite, in several of his letters and in his "Diary." He wrote in a letter dated March 6th, 1788:

"Yesterday I dined at a friend's. The savage hospitality of the place spent me the most part of the night over the nauseous potion in the bowl. This day sick, headache, low spirits, miserable, fasting, except for a draught of cold water or small beer. Now eight o'clock at night. . . . I could moralize to-night like a death's-head.

'Oh, what is life, that thoughtless wish of all?

A drop of honey in a draught of gall.'

"Nothing astonishes me more," he adds, "when a little sickness clogs the wheels of life, than the thoughtless career we run in the hour of health. 'None saith, where is God my Maker, that giveth songs in the night?' Oh give me, my Maker,

to remember Thee! Give me to act up to the dignity of my nature!"

Again he writes: "My life reminded me of a ruined temple; what strength, what proportion in some parts! What unsightly gaps, what prostrate ruins in others! I knelt down before the Father of mercies, and said, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in Thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son!'" In his *Common-Place Book* there is this entry—it is dated October, 1785: "If ever any young man, in the vestibule of the world, chance to throw his eye over these pages, let him pay a warm attention to the following observations, as I assure him they are the fruit of a poor devil's dear-bought experience. I have literally, like that great poet and gallant, and by consequence that great fool, Solomon, 'turned my eyes to behold madness and folly.' Nay, I have, with all the ardor of a lively, fanciful, and whimsical imagination, accompanied with a warm feeling, poetic heart, shaken hands with their intoxicating friendship. In the first place, let my pupil, as he tenders his own peace, keep up a regular, warm intercourse with the Deity. . . ."

Here the writing broke off and was never finished. Surely such words as these could not have been penned by a man unutterably bad. Mere animals in human form are never mad-

dened in this fashion against wrong, and are never crushed and condemned in their own esteem on account of their flagrant lapses from the cause of right. Perceiving this, and moved by his pathetic humiliation, it does seem as though every generous soul would deal tenderly with his memory, and would not forget, in condemning what in him was dark, his own appeal on behalf of the frail and erring:

“ Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman—
Tho’ they may gang a kennin’ wrang,
To step aside is human:
One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving *why* they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far, perhaps, they rue it ”

Painful and distressing as all this is, it is not without its wholesome moral. Pascal exclaimed, “O, the grandeur and the littleness, the excellence and the corruption, the majesty and the manners of life,” and, as we recall these words and the illustrations they have had in a Cato who was guilty of cruelty to his slaves; or in a Brutus who was an oppressive usurer; or in a Sallust who was notorious for his greed; or in a Seneca who was tainted with sycophancy; or in a Bacon, a Chateaubriand, a Lamartine or a Turner, who were all weak at some point, we must surely perceive that every earthly idol is

flawed, and in reality Burns no more than the rest. His infirmities, in common with those of others, wisely considered, will not encourage transgression, but will rather promote watchfulness. We are all exposed to temptation, and every time we hear his name or gaze upon his statue, in mute eloquence it reminds us of our peril and calls on us to guard our honor. If men of his giant mold err from the right way, pigmies must step softly and cautiously, or they will inevitably be belated. Well is it that this generation, a generation haughty, self-confident and presumptuous, should be confronted by his image, and should learn from his shortened days, that wrong-doing means shattered health, exhausted vitality and an early grave.

This, then, is the man to whom multitudes in America offer the homage of sincere affection, and for whom a place has already been made among the nation's immortals. It has frequently been deplored that Scotia's bard was never adequately appreciated during his life, and his contemporaries have been soundly abused for their apparent blindness to the greatness of his genius. In my opinion these censures are somewhat overdone. Unquestionably Burns might have been treated with more distinguished consideration by the literary classes of the capital, and particularly by the high-born, than he received, and

it seems as though a more congenial employment could have been procured for him than that of an Exciseman. But while this is reasonable, on the other hand it is not to be overlooked that our poet was extremely independent and disposed to regard offers of pecuniary aid as attempts to patronize and humiliate him; and, further, that it has never been customary for the representatives of government to take a marked interest in authors, and pension them before they have attained the maturity of their powers. Burns was in his grave before he had completed his thirty-eighth year. Moreover, in criticising his contemporaries, it should not be forgotten that it is not easy to do ample justice to a remarkable personage while he is yet on earth, unless his days extend toward the three-score years and ten mentioned in the Scriptures. Perspective in such a case is almost as indispensable as it is in estimating the magnitude of a mountain or the proportions of a building. The Cathedral at Milan does not impress the beholder with all its wealth of spires and statue unless he leaves the shadow of its walls, and stands some distance from it; and the glories of Mount Washington or Mont Blanc are not perceptible to him who insists on contemplating them in some narrow ravine or valley at the base. Let the lover of architecture and of

nature remove from close proximity, and select the true point of vision, and the objects of his admiration will loom up before him in magnificence and majesty. A great man, likewise, can rarely be comprehended or the splendor of his genius be fully appreciated by those who are near him. He must be withdrawn from them, or they must be withdrawn from him, for his real worth and grandeur to be clearly discerned. Death is the ordinary means by which this end is accomplished. The grave furnishes the true perspective; when its shadows intervene, the outlines of the figure enwrapped in them appear boldly and sharply. Then can be readily seen the weight and breadth of character, with the mental and moral brilliancy which invests it with imperishable light. The seeming injustice of the prominent people who were intimately associated with Burns, is, after all, comparatively unimportant. It was neither exceptional nor uncommon, and neither does it signify much anyway. The real question is, has humanity understood him and rendered the poet his due, and exalted him to his rightful place in the world's Pantheon? He wrote for humanity, not for a tribe or clan, and he wrote for all ages and not merely for his own times. Does humanity cherish his memory and the ages honor his genius with their reverent homage? Let the

untold copies of his works, the frequent commemorations of his birth, the monuments reared in various portions of the globe, and his effigy in bronze now adorning the charming park at Albany answer. And let the answer revive the hopes and strengthen the faith of those noble men and women who are now toiling in obscurity for their fellow-beings, who are accomplishing their mission of love unnoticed and unsung. Humanity is not unjust. It is not unmindful of the devotion and sacrifices of its friends. The generation that now is may sweep onward to the unseen, oblivious of the benefactors who are strewing its path with flowers. But there are generations to come who will recognize the footprints of these heroic laborers, and who will gather up the unwithered flowers and twine them into wreaths of fame, beautiful and immortal.

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